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U.S. a Nazi sanctuary?

By NANCY EHMANN AL P-I

BRANCHBURG — Living in a country where freedom is taken for granted, it's hard to believe that just 44 years ago, Jews were herded into huge chambers where they were gassed by the thousands, or made to lie face down in huge ditches, shot at point blank range and buried in bloody graves.

The Holocaust is not something most of us like to think about, yet we must remember, for to forget would be to risk these atrocities happening again.

This was the message John Loftus brought to a crowd of 100 people at Somerset County College last week, and his presentation touched off a unexpected heated debate with audience members.

Loftus is the author of "The Belarus Secret," a history of the Nazi smuggling programs in America. A former trial attorney for the Justice Department's office of special investigations, and an expert in Byelorussian or White Russian Nazis, Loftus spent two years tracking the long-hidden records of Byelorussian Nazis who were brought into the country illegally by the State Department.

"What am I doing here?" Loftus opened. "I am not a Jew. I'm an Irish-Catholic. I wasn't even born during the Holocaust. But I want to make sure this doesn't happen again — to Jews, to Gentiles, to anyone."

Byelorussian Nazis were actually recruited by our own State Department, Loftus said, even though Congress had barred them from entering the country.

Loftus claims the smuggling occurred during the years after World War II, a time when covert agencies in the U.S. and Britain feared that World War III would break out at any minute. The head of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) recruited the Nazis as spies because of their strategic knowledge about life behind the Iron Curtain.

Presidents Roosevelt and Truman knew nothing of this, Loftus continued.

"The Nazis would work for anyone, and were actually hired as intelligence agents. CIA officials lied to the federal court, saying they were trustworthy so they could become citizens. Meanwhile, the Nazis were giving our secrets to Russia. The State Department was very embarrassed."

During his years of research, Loftus found file after file, documenting confessions of Nazi leaders like Stanislaw Stankievich, "The Butcher of Borrisow," a Byelorussian Nazi who led the slaughter of thousands of Jews during the Third Reich's "final solution."

Page after page of the files revealed a sickening account of Stankievich's inhumane methods of exterminating Jews.

"It was the morning of March 20, 1941. Stankievich's police force got a little drunk, then made thousands of Jews lie head to toe in ditches so that each bullet would kill two of them. The children were thrown on top of their dying parents and buried alive," Loftus said, adding that Stankevich was promoted for his efficiency.

The documents revealed that Stankevich's murderous tactics even revolted Adolph Eichmann, the architect of the Holocaust, and resulted in Eichmann's "more humane" method of taking Jews in cattle carts to gas chambers.

"The evidence against Stankevich was overwhelming, yet the State Department let him go in 1948," Loftus reported. "He admitted to all the atrocities, and was actually given a job on a State Department radio station."

The Stankevich case never came to trial, because he died two weeks before he was to be tried in Federal Court for war crimes.

Loftus photocopied a case load of the Justice Department files and resigned from his post in 1981 to write his book. "The Justice Department didn't know which files I had copied," he said.

Traveling with Loftus was Sol

Schnadow, a survivor of a Nazi concentration camp, who fled from the horrors of the Nazi regime 40 years ago and settled with his wife Helen in South River, New Jersey.

It was not until he read Stankievich's obituary in the newspaper that Schnadow realized the man who had imprisoned him also had lived in South River, just a few miles away.

Introduced by Loftus as "a hero of the Jewish resistance" Schnadow contacted Loftus after seeing a special segment of "The Belarus Secret" on television's "60 Minutes" last year. Since that time, Loftus said he and Schnadow have become "good friends" and Schnadow travels with him as a speaker.

His pain undimmed by time, Schnadow slowly walked to the stage to talk about the ugliness of the past saying "In all the camp there was one German. One single German! And 150 White Russians in German uniforms who slaughtered the people."

Schnadow's statement angered an elderly man whose recollections were quite different. "I was also there, and I remember Byelorussians taking Jews into their homes and smuggling Jewish children out of the country. How can you say that all Byelorussians were Nazis and murderers?"

"I didn't say all," Schnadow replied. "I said many."

A young man yelled, "You're trying to make it look like the White Russians caused the Holocaust, like they're to blame."

"No! Schnadow shouted hoarsely. "There was a White Russian sergeant who gave me a gun and helped me to escape the camp before I was executed. There were good White Russians too."

Continuing, Schnadow said compellingly, "But the snow was covered with blood every day and that is the God's honest truth — and no one can change that."